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ABSTRACT

Economic restructuring has severely affected the education of girls, particularly in the poorest and least developed countries where poverty is the major obstacle to education. Girls still constitute the majority of children not enrolled in school, and illiteracy among women remains one of the biggest challenges for the 21st century. Deep-rooted prejudices that women are subordinate to men permeate educational principles, curricula, methods, and materials. Although females account for more than half of technical and vocational enrollment, they keep choosing "female" fields. Sexist attitudes among teachers and a lack of women teachers and administrators are other obstacles to girls' enrollment and selection of school subjects. In most societies, awareness that females can excel in fields traditionally reserved for males has increased in recent years. Elimination of stereotypes in formal and nonformal education programs has been scattered and haphazard, however. The positive results of skills-based literacy programs for women in 14 countries in Asia and the Pacific demonstrate the potential benefits of gender-sensitive education for women. Enrollment alone does not guarantee girls' retention and achievement. Positive role models, gender-sensitive curricula, and a practical methodology for promoting women's status in society are critical to attracting females into professional/technical fields generally reserved for males. (Contains 56 references.) (MN)

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Gender-Sensitive Education for a Better World

By

Namtip Aksornkool

Background Document

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GENDER-SENSITIVE EDUCATION FOR A BETTER WORLD

By Namtip Aksornkool[1]

> *Creation of educational and social environment, in which women and men, girls and boys, are treated equally and encouraged to achieve their full potential, respecting their freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, and where educational resources promote non-stereotyped images of women and men, would be effective in the elimination of the causes of discrimination against women and inequalities between women and men.*
>
> **-Platform of Action 1995**

Introduction

Gender disparity in education has been well-established. It threatens to outlive the present generation and many more to come. The strong social, cultural and economic concerns nurtured by traditional societies often block the access of women and girls to education, and later weaken their participation in, and contribution to, their family and society.

This paper examines the gender disparity in both formal and nonformal education. It underlines the verdict stressed at the Mid-Decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (Amman 1996) that **there can be no enduring progress in Education for All (EFA) if special attention is not paid to female education.**

This paper argues that gender-sensitive education has value for all members of society - men as well as women. It is probably, the best education which can help create a learning atmosphere that is fair and sustainable for all. It promises, therefore, to be a viable alternative for the building of enduring progress in EFA.

Lack of access is only the tip of the iceberg. The paper discusses sexist curricula and contents and how these deter the advancement of women and girls in roles other than those of mothers and wives. It also shows how teachers and education managers, alike, are liable to promoting sex stereotypes in their dealing with learners and among themselves. This ultimately damages girls' and women's aspirations and chances for success in life.

The paper also gives examples of UNESCO and other actions designed to counter stereotypes regarding access and quality of contents and methods of education. As promising as they are, these initiatives, are scattered. They bring no sustainable change on a large scale and hence, they leave the global situation unchallenged.

In order to have sustainable impacts, the contents and methods of education have to be rendered gender-sensitive. Teachers and other facilitators need to be re-oriented to be more sensitive to the needs and situations of learners of both sexes, a monitoring mechanism has to be put in place to ensure that policy statements are adhered to during implementation. Finally, it will be important to render the learners' environment gender sensitive, as well. This will include not only raise the support for gender sensitive education among the learners' parents and the public but also create other support systems which will nurture both women and men in a world where equal partnership between the sexes is not only possible but desirable.

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[1] The author wishes to express her thanks to Miss E. Taylor and Mr N. Ulano for their kind assistance in the preparation of this paper.

Society's preference for boys

Around the world, the female sex has always been branded as inferior, peripheral and of no value - right from birth. Newborn boys bring celebration while the birth of a girl spreads fear and anticipation of the worst. In certain parts of the Terai region of Nepal, for example, the community weeps when a girl is born (Shrestha et al., 1990). Chinese families with a feudal tradition, rank girls as low as pigs or dogs (China's Ministry of Culture, 1983).

The age-old belief that women have lower value than men is still reflected in some common sayings and customs:

- In Siberia - *long hair, short mind.*
- In Vietnam - *one son is children, two daughters are none.*
- In Madagascar - *women are weak furniture.*
- In China - *a married daughter is like water that has been thrown out.*

Parents in traditional societies see girls as "transient" members to be married off to another family while boys are heirs to carry the family name. This belief is universal - from Africa to Asia to Oceania to Latin America. While men identify themselves in terms of what they do, women describe themselves as relatives of others, especially men (Bisaria, 1985). In the Thai tradition, only male children can save their mother by entering monkhood. It is believed that mothers, holding on to their son's monk robe[2], could ensure themselves a passage to *nirvana* - the ultimate liberation.

Economic, social and cultural constraints

Economic restructuring has severely affected the education of girls, particularly in the poorest and least developed countries (LDCs) where poverty is the major obstacle to education. Faced with the cost of lunches, uniforms, and learning materials, parents favour boys' schooling only. The rural Bangladeshi of all classes spend up to 83 per cent of their educational budget on boys. They expect their sons to look after them in their old age and hence invest in boys' education. (Stromquist 1994)

Undeniably, girls are on a par with boys in terms of learning achievement. Chinapah (1997) describes primary school tests in five countries, where girls performed better than boys but *only* in earlier grades. In subsequent grades, children who were putting in two hours, or longer, a day for household chores fared worse in tests of literacy, numeracy and life skills than those who gave housework one hour or less.

In most developing countries, girls contribute enormously to running the household. The poorer parents keep daughters as the "second mother". In Nepal, they work as long, if not longer, hours as adult men. The need to assign to them the chores of fetching water, fodder and firewood and minding the younger ones precludes long-term family investment in their education. The detrimental effect of such demand on the girl's time was stressed in the Platform of Action:

> "Girls and young women are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities... resulting in poor scholastic performance and early drop-out... This has long-lasting consequences for all aspects of women's lives."

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[2] In Thailand, there are no female monks.

On top of economic considerations, illiterate parents are genuinely concerned that educating daughters can be harmful. Benin's *Report to the African Conference on Empowerment - Pathway to Women's Empowerment* reflects the belief,

> "For some parents, educating a daughter is synonymous with ... favouring overindulgence in sin. For these same parents, education risks upsetting the arranged marriages set up between families. They fear that, once educated, the girls will go against the established customs of the society. For example, they can refuse their parents' choice of husband, or discuss matters on an equal basis with a man." (1996:8)

Parental opposition reflects a wider and stronger social tendency to denigrate the female sex. In a paper presented at the Seminar on Women's Education amidst Economic, Social and Political Change (Hamburg, 1995), Ruzvidzo echoes the complaint of a once illiterate Zimbabwean woman:

> "Fathers did not think of a girl's education. Those who tried to educate girls were ridiculed by other men for wasting money. They always thought girls deserve no education because they were prostitutes..." (Ruzvidzo 1995)

In most traditional societies, parents see the roles of their daughters as limited to being future mothers and wives. Many parents in these societies consider schools unable to prepare girls for their anticipated roles. Several country papers presented at the International Consultation on Girls and Women's Education in LDCs (Paris 1995), including Burkina Faso and Sudan, report that what school provides is irrelevant to the specific and perceived needs of girls.

A genuine concern exists that educated girls have problems finding a husband. In the communities of Papua New Guinea and Zambia - where brides carry a price - any delay in the marrying of the daughter is seen as a risk. Many people are afraid that educated girls might pose a threat to their prospective mates, a challenge to their authority. Some African societies do not welcome 'men's rivalry with their wives regarding knowledge' (*Report of the International Consultation on Girls and Women's Education in LDCs*, Paris, 1995).

A study of non-formal education for women in a few countries in Africa indicates that "women have to follow strict rules and submit to all men, and their husbands, in particular" (Niyonsima 1994). As a result, their self-esteem weakens and self-denial becomes the norm. Under such conditions, women's aspiration for education wanes.

In some LDCs - Cape Verde, Chad, Guinea and Niger - parents fear that daughters might fall victim to harassment (*Report of International Consultation on the Education of Girls and Women*, 1995). Exposure to life outside the home, according to parents, might lead to sexual promiscuity, early marriage and unwanted pregnancy.

In parts of Africa, school pregnancies are on the rise. AIDS pandemic compounds the threat to safety as evidence from around the world shows women contracting and dying of AIDS at a younger age than men. Girls who barely reach puberty are prime targets as they are less likely to be infected (*Countdown*, UNESCO 1997).

There are other reasons for concern about safety. Absence of toilets for girls in some schools of Namibia, Sudan, Gambia and other countries leads to lack of privacy, forcing girls to stay at home during menstruation. Long distances in the sparsely populated areas of such countries as Bhutan diminish security on the way to school. In the cold season, when classrooms are not heated, Mongolian parents keep their children at home. In Arab countries, girls withdraw from schools if their parents

uphold "the importance of a safe school environment for girls, instead of one that will threaten or intimidate..." (UNESCO 1996:39)

Girls' access

Since the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Thailand, there has been substantial progress, notably in the overall primary school enrolment. The Mid-Decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (Amman 1996) confirmed that fifty million more children are now in schools than in 1990 and the number of out-of-school children has decreased by 20 million.

Despite these gains, several UNESCO reports and statistical data indicate that girls constitute the majority of unenrolled children. Of the world's 129 million out-of-school children, girls make up 60 per cent, or 77 million (UNESCO 1995). Net enrolment ratios (NER) for girls stay below those for boys, especially in the Arab States and South Asia where few countries are close to the parity line, and only one is above it. In the sub-Saharan Africa only ten countries have NERs for girls equal to, or higher than, those for boys.

In the developing world as a whole, the girls' share of primary enrolment in the last five years has nudged up by 0.3 points only - from 45.5 in 1990 to 45.8 per cent in 1995.

By the year 2000, only one more country is likely to arrive at the EFA goal for boys - but not for girls. While nearly half of the sub-Saharan countries report a decline in girls' enrolment, Arab governments have improved primary enrolment for girls in all but three of the region's 21 countries (*Education for All Mid-Decade Meeting, Statistical Document,* Amman, Jordan, June 1996).

Women's access

Illiteracy among women will remain one of the biggest challenges in the twenty-first century. Of the 885 million illiterate adults in the world, 565 million are women, against 320 million men. Half of these women live in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa where literacy rates in 1995 stood at 36 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively (UNESCO 1994).

The trend lingers over time. In 1980-1995, when the number of male illiterates decreased by six million, the figure for women grew by 14 million. The gap persists in most regions. In the sub-Saharan Africa, the year 2000 will see the illiteracy ratio of 175 women to 100 men, a leap from 164/100 in 1990. It was also reported that an equally disturbing tendency in South Asia where the ratio grew from 166 to 175.5/100 in the same time range.

The document, *Status and Trends* (UNESCO 1994), cautions that, despite decreasing rates in some regions, the absolute numbers of illiterates will rise everywhere. Moreover, by the year 2000, illiteracy will become 'a female phenomenon'. Anita Dighe, in her paper for a UNESCO workshop, asks:

> 'Why is it that women are illiterate in such vast numbers? What accounts for their failure to become literate? To what extent is it the failure of the individual woman and to what degree is it the result of contextual factors? Do individuals determine their own success or do other people set deterrents to this effort?'

The root of the problem -- sex stereotypes

It is a mistake to assume that girls' access to schools guarantees a proper education and a better future. On top of the reasons mentioned above, it is the learning materials that reinforce their sense of inferiority - to such a degree that girls drop out before gaining sufficient functional literacy and other basic skills.

In most cases the unconscious or implied principle, in curricula, materials and methods, is to portray men as breadwinners in the traditional sense of the word. The subconscious rule is to picture the domesticated female and silence the contribution that women make to the economy and well-being.

The deep-rooted prejudice that women are subordinate to men permeates education. Sex stereotyping persists in many forms and in all countries regardless of the level of development (UNESCO 1989).

A survey of five African countries found striking gender imbalances in men's favour in all countries. Another major finding - *a conspicuous lack of support to gender sensitisation efforts in the education sector* (Wamahiu 1996).

In textbooks, women and girls are mentioned less frequently than men and boys. The same goes for female activities, functions, concerns and aspirations. Invariably, the female face appears in a 'man's world' where girls and women are marginal and dispensable (UNESCO, 1986 and 1995). They are passive, shy, weak and overshadowed by the adventurous, active, inquisitive, courageous, strong, heroic and clever boys and men. Female preoccupations - inevitably belonging to the world of mothers and wives - grow into jobs related to their role as nurturers, such as kindergarten teachers, cooks, nurses.

Materials for the newly literate, as analysed by UNESCO in 1990, proclaim emphasis on women as mothers and nurturers:

> *Nutrition for mother and child care, Lectures over the radio on mother and child care, Oh my dear child, Loving mothers, Beware of nannies,* and *Our children.*

Sent from Bangladesh, China, Thailand, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, these brochures have had counterparts generated year in year out everywhere in the world. Pages 6 to 8 from selected school texts and literacy readers are a vivid picture of the imbalance of gender representation.

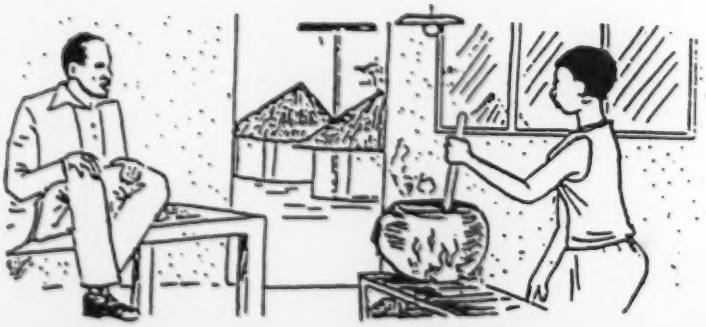
At workshops organized within the project, Skills-based literacy programmes for women, and the Special project for girls and women in Africa, most participants draw a man when asked to picture a farmer - despite the common belief that women constitute the majority of the farmers, in particular in Africa! One way or another, people's attitudes - *as instilled by education on the roles of the sexes* - become independent of their conscious knowledge.

Women's potential for excelling in different fields receives scanty mention in educational materials. A participant at the UNESCO Workshop, Eliminating from Educational Resources (Melbourne, 1990) bluntly pointed out that such silencing is equivalent to 'telling lies' and distorting facts. Materials rarely picture women as managers, pilots, doctors, or heads of state. In writing about her country, Tanzania, Sekwao sums up:

> "Most textbooks depict women as well as men in gender typed roles. Women are shown as cooks, as patients, men as office workers, doctors; girls wash dishes, sweep the compound while boys play football or herd cattle. Such images are for men only... Any change is regarded abnormal." (1995)

STEREOTYPED ROLES OF WOMEN
AS LIMITED TO MOTHERS AND WIVES

STEREOTYPED ROLES OF WOMEN AS LIMITED TO MOTHERS AND WIVES



STEREOTYPED ROLES OF WOMEN
AS LIMITED TO MOTHERS AND WIVES

The UNESCO report, *Education of Girls in Asia and the Pacific* (1986), based on views of primary education experts, concludes that curricula and materials reinforce the stereotype of dependent and exclusively domestic roles for women. In preschools and primary schools girls lack opportunities to develop spatial skills and perform weakly in technical areas, mathematics and sciences.

However, stereotyping extends far beyond the pages of textbooks and school walls. A study of African journalism by the Forum of African Women Educators discovered rampant resort to clichés and trivialized portrayal of female roles, neglect for female experience and emphasis on sensationalism (FAWE 1996). In and out of schools, these influences reinforce each other and grow into sexism in the young and impressionable minds.

Choosing the subject, choosing the future

While women and girls account for more than half of technical and vocational enrolment, they keep choosing "female fields", such as health and home economics. Men, on the other hand, constitute three quarters of entrants to industry, engineering and agricultural courses (UNESCO 1997). In Korea, girls occupy 80 per cent of places in commerce but only 0.2 per cent are enrolled in fishery and marine courses.

In a UNESCO study, *Current issues and trends in technical and vocational education*, several countries report the following fields to be popular among women, for example, paramedics (Benin), home economics and hotel catering (Jordan), dietetic nursing, typing and secretarial work (Italy), institutional housekeeping, food technology (Mexico), child care and nursing (Niger), dressmaking, shop assistance, hotel catering, secretarial services (Zaire), and embroidery, leatherwork, basketry (Mauritius) (Dyankov 1996). In some countries, certain areas are off-limits to girls. In Kuwait, for example, girls have no access to courses in auto mechanics.

Dyankov (1996) concludes that in several countries including Bahrain, Greece, Cyprus, Jordan, Italy and Spain, the "tradition of sex-biased technical education still exists." Unfortunately, such a view is more the norm than the exception. A paper presented at the UNESCO workshop on technical and vocational education for girls (Seoul 1995) reflects a certain complacency in the educator's view on choices made by girls:

"... curriculum design of vocational education for women has become more rational with more courses adapted to social needs, the quick development of the third production and women's characteristics. There are courses in secretarial work, filing, accounting, fashion, nursing, childhood education, tourism, cosmetology, textile, hotel service and administration and public relations. These are offered in girls' vocational schools and are chosen mostly by girls..." (Zu-Guang Yu 1995:4)

Mishra, Khanna, Shrivastava, and Sharma (1995) regret the 'home-science syndrome' in India where stereotype practices affect the placement of girls in highly demanded jobs in the technology and science sectors. A report from Bahrain (Fakhro 1995) indicates the same trend. For many women, training, if it exists, is open only for jobs in low demand - sewing, home economics and secretarial skills. Barred from lucrative industries, options available to girls shrink to teaching, nursing and social welfare. With such training, women are unlikely to serve their countries in technical and professional jobs.

Studies indicate that prejudices which assign functions to individuals according to sex take root at an early age. Often they are embedded in school resources but neither pupils, teachers, nor parents perceive them as such. Centuries of social conditioning have led to effortless acceptance of sexist images (UNESCO 1989).

Nganunu (1995) reports a study revealing that, in most cases, the separation of training areas for girls and boys is rather arbitrary and serves to maintain the status quo.

Another factor compounds the problem. In some countries girls enter non-traditional fields and end up out of work because of employers' bias and parents' and societal views that women should not work outside their homes or in *inappropriate* fields. Intimidated, most girls shy away from science and technology (Mishra, Khanna, Shrivastava and Sharma 1995, Fakhro 1995 and Nganunu 1995).

Sexist attitudes among teachers

The issue of girls' education goes well beyond educational resources. Teachers play a significant role in influencing the success and failure of their pupils. In the classroom they are not oblivious of gender issues. Their interpretation of the contents, their attention to, and interaction with, learners; the way they assign duties and homework - all are determined by the broad patriarchal vision of the universe that keeps intact the hierarchy of the sexes (Wamahiu 1996).

Different treatment of girls and boys by teachers, lack of sufficient role models for girls and inadequate access to teachers' time, facilities and equipment contribute to girls lagging behind boys. Some teachers do not believe in girls' intellectual capacity. Their attitudes and their words can discourage girls and hamper their progress in school (Niger Country Report 1996).

Two recent studies financed by UNESCO in Burkina Faso and Niger confirm that both male and female teachers prefer to encourage boys. The studies observes the ways in which teachers' discipline pupils and allocate small tasks in 25 and 20 schools in Burkina Faso and Niger, respectively. Boys, according to the study< receive "the most attention during arithmetic and reading." Girls are also discouraged from taking maths and science as these are considered "virile" subjects (UNESCO *Countdown* 1997). The Burkina Faso study concludes that girls are invariably asked to clean up while boys enjoy more responsible jobs, supervising classmates in teachers' absence or taking care of materials. Teachers' preference for boys continues even though teachers in the Niger study admitted to being aware of their own prejudice.

The two studies conclude that research findings such as theirs need to be considered in the adjustment of teacher training curriculum. integrated into the teacher training curriculum. Future teachers need to be made aware of such unfair practice against girls and "... redress this imbalance, identify and avoid sexist material and help girl pupils to realize the importance of education including science and maths."

A study on a sample group of Korean teachers revealed their overwhelming belief (73.6%) that boys are superior in mathematics and science (Kim 1988).

Very few countries have made efforts at integrating gender-sensitive training into their teacher training courses (*UNESCO* 1995).

Women teachers

Lack of women teachers poses another obstacle to the enrolment of girls and hampers their selection of subjects. Few countries, particularly among the LDCs, have taken steps to recruit women teachers. Indeed, qualified women are harder to find than men, notably in technical areas (UNESCO 1995).

The presence of women teachers may encourage parents to send their girls to school. On the other hand, their presence does not automatically lead to improved performance of the girls. Wamahiu (1996) quotes studies which conclude that female as well as male teachers treat pupils with sex biases. Often biased treatment by women teachers is more blatant, e.g., in Botswana. Secondary school girls in Kenya reportedly feel that women teachers discriminate against them more than their male colleagues.

On the non-formal education side, husbands and fathers in several societies, e.g., Afghanistan, often refuse to let their female relatives attend classes held by men. Aware of this, programme managers in these societies seek to recruit female facilitators. In some regions, e.g. in the districts of Chinhat and Bakshi-ka-Talab, Lucknow, India, many educated women volunteer to teach because it is considered inappropriate for them to seek work outside their own villages (UNESCO 1989).

Other societies with similar beliefs report great difficulty in finding educated women to run learning centres for adults. The nature of adult education - mostly through evening classes - and the distances between centres and homes often pose a threat to women facilitators. When they do volunteer, they often do not enjoy the same access to training as their male counterparts. Ten years ago in training workshops for literacy workers in China, for example, there were one or two women participants as compared to eighty or one hundred men. While this might not have been a deliberate action to bypass women, it indicates that decision makers do not question the sex imbalance among the participants.

Female non-formal education workers are themselves burdened with the biases and prejudices caused by socialization. With all their good intentions and dedication, they need to be aware of, and feel respect for, the potential roles and contribution of women and their unique characteristics.

Managing fairly?

In addition to facilitators and teachers, educational administrators play a significant role in the success of learners. Women school heads and non-formal education programme administrators are few and far between. The higher the level of the institution, the more serious this problem becomes. Even at the primary level, where women teachers are more abundant, the heads of schools are generally men. While in charge of the programmes, the management are often unaware of their bias. They downplay the potential role of girls in the *nontraditional female fields* without realizing the damage they inflict on the girls' psyche. This is clearly reflected in the video, *Pacific Women in Trade*.

Male managers are often unaware that some of their attitudes deter girls and women from taking high-status and well-paid jobs. Overwhelmingly, educational staff interviewed by Wamahiu in her study of five African countries agree that *senior policy makers and middle management and teachers need to be gender sensitised.*

Ironically, despite the urgent needs for increased sensitivity among senior policy-makers, gender workshops rarely reach them as they often regard such workshops a women's domain. Worse, many managers consider gender training is designed to develop confrontational attitudes towards men (Wamahiu 1996).

There may be a need for positive discrimination to ensure that more women take on the challenge of administration. Training programmes for women professionals and their male counterparts should be *de rigueur* while the system itself must prepared to offer them appropriate positions.

Gender-sensitivity – not for women alone

In recent years, there has been increasing awareness in most societies that, except for child bearing, breast feeding and some tasks requiring excessive physical exertion, women as well as men can excel in fields traditionally reserved for men and boys. The fact that there have been women scientists, electricians, automechanics, pilots, doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, managers, to give but a few examples, attests to the claim that demarcation of roles along sex lines is baseless. This reality engendered some assertive action to correct the situation.

The *Platform of Action* states that in order to eliminate the cause of discrimination against women and inequalities between the sexes, it is absolutely necessary to create "...the educational and social environment in which women and men, girls and boys, are treated equally and are encouraged to achieve their full potential... and where educational resources promote non-stereotyped images of women and men."

As a lead United Nations Agency in education, UNESCO attempts to work with its Member States in increasing access of women and girls to nontraditional and remunerative areas of studies. It also works with curriculum and material developers to produce educational resources which are gender-sensitive and to sensitize teachers and administrators to gender issues.

Women, as well as men, can and should be able to enjoy the functions and activities which have long been off limits to them. A programme for boys in a non-sexist school in Melbourne, Australia, gave them a chance to learn female skills. According to a male pupil, he had the opportunity to relinquish peer pressure and stay away from activities he normally does not enjoy - such as admiring and studying racing cars. He also strengthened his self-reliance. Today he can fix his shirts, cook his own meals. Learning about child care has helped him feel more gentle toward children and increased his sensitivity - a quality, he feels, he would otherwise have been deprived of.

Although women bear an unfair share of burden in the family and society, their grievances might need to be seen from the male perspective as well. It has often been assumed that men like the ways things are. The gender perspective helps look at what men stand to gain if programmes become gender-sensitive.

Opening up opportunities for women also means increasing options for men. Once the rigid demarcation lines of tasks, roles and functions are broken down, men would be freer to take up tasks which were formerly stigmatized as being only for women.

For example, if more support is given to women to increase their earning capacity, there will be less pressure on men to make ends meet as breadwinners. If women are working outside the home, men will need to share housework -- caring for children, taking part in their education, cooking and cleaning.

Despite the time and work involved, many men enjoy the opportunity to be more involved in their children's lives and earn the much needed affection from their children. At the same time, they are no longer dependent on women in taking care of themselves.

Scattered action, haphazard change

The Final Report of the Mid-Decade Meeting to the International Consultative Forum of Education for All (UNESCO 1996) condemned gender-stereotyping in curricula and materials and advocate the elimination of stereotypes from formal as well as non-formal education programmes.

But as early as 1994, Stromquist, in her studies of educational programmes funded by development agencies around the world, concluded that funding agencies pay attention to access at the expense of programme contents, materials and methods. She examined a large number of programmes which are still using sexist materials.

In Africa, and other continents, the efforts to sensitise relevant personnel in matters of gender have been timid. But programme and material developers are increasingly, *albeit* slowly, realizing the importance of projecting the roles of the sexes in nonsexist ways. The practice of propagating stereotyped literacy programmes and school curricula is being questioned more and more insistently.

Countries are beginning to examine the extent of sex stereotyping in existing materials. In Niger, a study is under way to evaluate sexism in textbooks. Teaching aids begin to seek to correct teachers' attitudes (Benin Country Report 1996 to the African Conference on the Empowerment of Women and Girls' Education). Several countries undergoing educational reforms have attempted to remove gender bias from their materials. The Ghanaian reform has brought about textbooks and aids that are relatively free of stereotypes (Ghana Country Report 1996).

Clearly, gender sensitivity does not imply a blind push to put women and girls in places traditionally belonging to men and boys. Gender sensitive programmes seek to highlight their actual and potential roles. Learners must feel helped in their reflection on the place of men and women in society. They must have a wide choice of alternatives outside those imposed by rigid beliefs.

Zambia is promoting gender-neutral material and guidelines prepared by the Curriculum Development Centre for book publishers. Namibia has acted to produce school textbooks which represent men and women in a positive light and use participatory methods when addressing customs and sexist practices. (Nghiyofnanye 1995)

Functional literacy programmes should convey a sense of urgency in applying what is learned into real life. Botswana's 1994 Revised Policy on Education mandated the Non-Formal Education Department to make *extra effort* to "encourage women to engage in projects that are more profitable and have been dominated by men..." The Department is reviewing the curriculum for literacy to make it gender-sensitive and responsive to new developments. (Legwaila, M I. et al 1996)

With all the efforts to produce gender-sensitive material, its use has not been widespread and systematic. Despite frequent attempts to adjust textbooks and other resources, most countries, among them Lao PDR, Namibia, Pakistan, South Africa and Zambia, are reporting that, on a large scale, gender balance has not been a guiding principle in curricular reforms.

Changes are slow because alterations in learning material imply, among other things, the conviction on the part of *the author*. Tuli Mevava Nghiyofnanye, of Namibia, laments:

> "It is worth noting that, since independence, only a few gender sensitive textbooks have been written. Discussion points encouraging the learners to question their customs and traditions, hence their traditional roles, were never part of the pre-independence school curriculum. (1995)"

While there are efforts at producing gender-sensitive materials such as those discussed below, they are still few in number and, as such, do not leave a great impact. It would be important to raise the awareness within government agencies and NGOs of the need for preparing materials free of sex stereotypes and to build in a monitoring mechanism to ensure that sensitivity continues as a guiding principle at the implementation level.

One approach, two continents

Fourteen countries in Asia and the Pacific. including Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Thailand and Vietnam, have taken similar steps regarding the *UNESCO-UNDP Skills-Based Literacy Programmes for Women.* Participating countries receive training and hands-on experience in preparing gender-sensitive materials. As a result, over 700 literacy and post-literacy reading and leaning materials were prepared to strengthen the self-reliance and empowerment of women and girls.

The material, originally catering for adult women, soon went to the young and male learners. It covers such themes as the value of work done by women and men; nontraditional skills, among them electronics; women and men in kindergarten teaching, in leadership positions and mutually beneficial co-operation; sharing of household responsibilities; positive role models for both sexes; making informed choices in life. Reports on implementation indicate that material is treated as a positive alternative and more concerted efforts will ensure its sustainable development. What is badly needed is commitment at the national level to invest in the gender adjustment of educational material for the equal benefit of learners of both sexes. Extracts from these booklets are shown on pages 15 to 18.

At national follow-up workshops, more materials are produced to meet local needs. The Thai Department of curriculum and material development has undertaken to be more gender-sensitive and project positive images of women and men in a similar light.

During the Workshop on material development for Southern Thai women, the Department of non-formal education followed the UNESCO's training approach, *Educate to Empower,* and produced a series of 16 easy-to-read booklets suitable for both women and men. Their stories include a widow's struggle to make ends meet and her setting up a small stall selling attractively repackaged dried sea food to tourists; a story of how a father copes with his daughter- the only child - and how he comes to terms with his own attitude; another booklet tells of a young girl working in an electronics factory and how she gradually works her way up the ladder to become a supervisor, one booklets deals with how a family worked together to pick up the pieces and rebuild their lives after their house and all their belongings were washed away in a flood.

In the Thai materials, and in those produced by other countries under the same framework, each booklet covers a different aspect (or aspects) of gender relations in society. For example, Rokeya Rahman Kabir, in her booklet, *Sabina Comes out into the Light*, touches on parental prejudice against daughters, child marriage, the variety of chores facing a wife and a daughter-in-law, wife beating and abandon, gainful employment for self-reliance, women's participation in agricultural activities, support of women's organizations and, finally, due recognition of women's effort by the family.

This approach to gender orientation was subsequently used among African non-formal educators and radio producers in the framework of UNESCO's Special project for women's and girls' education. The first in a series of sub-regional and national workshops, this training sought to strengthen links between gender-sensitive out-of-school education and radio broadcasting in their advocacy and educational efforts.

The workshop produced eight packages of easy-to-read illustrated materials and respective radio programmes. Among the subjects covered by the material were child marriage, dowry, small business, daughters' worth and the value of their education, sharing of household responsibilities, legal rights, earning skills, violence against women, girls' labour and child prostitution, understanding female physiology. The project will organize and strengthen nonformal education centres for adult women and help improve the national capacity for the production and distribution of relevant learning material (printed and radio) among poor women and young girls. The material will also serve as supplementary learning materials in primary school.

MULTIPLE ROLES OF WOMEN

Bangladesh

CONTROLLING THEIR INCOME

Papua New Guinea

ORGANIZING THEMSELVES

WOMEN

DIRECTING THEIR LIVES

FORGET ABOUT THE CURSES YOU YOUNG WOMEN THINK YOU'RE SO MODERN. YOU SPEND MUCH MONEY ON CHEMICAL PESTICIDES. WOMEN WILL ALWAYS BE CURSED BUT WE MUST LEARN TO CONTROL OUR OWN LIVES
YES AMA - WE DID. BUT NOW EVERYTHING IS DEAD. I'M SICK AND TIRED, ALL OUR LABOUR ENDED UP BEING NOTHING. WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?

Bhutan

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MULTIPLE ROLES OF WOMEN

Australia

"Tools and Technology"

Some women risk losing their jobs because computers are taking over their work.

IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Lao PDR

Then the rainy season comes.

Thongchan and everyone in her family are very busy.

AS FARMERS

WOMEN

AS LEARNERS

Bangladesh

AS BUSINESS LEADERS

BU, WE HAVE A PROBLEM NOW SO MANY ORDERS COME WE CANNOT KEEP UP WITH THEM
WELL, PAK WE HAVE NO CHOICE WE SHOULD HIRE SOME MORE WORKERS, BUY SOME MORE MATERIALS AND TOOLS
PAK, YOU GO AND ASK PAK TOTO TO FIND THREE MORE WORKERS --

Indonesia

MULTIPLE ROLES OF WOMEN

Thailand

That night Wanpen thinks hard.
Some words are still in her head...
"Your wife is so lucky. She stays happily at home." "Good for being so quiet."

QUESTIONING THEIR OWN CONDITIONS

WOMEN

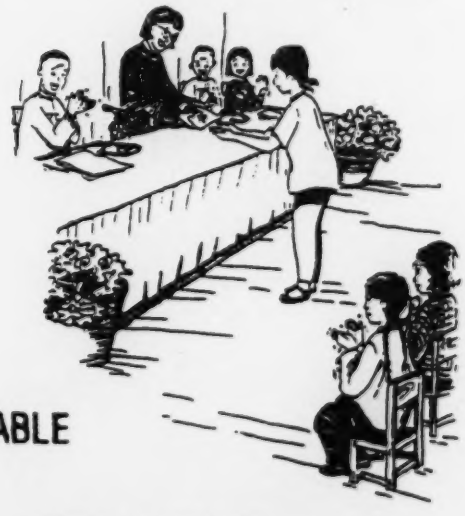
AS HUMAN BEINGS

Who Am I?

They say I am a woman, delicate and weak; That I am ignorant, so, I must not speak. But I am a woman, with a mind of my own. I am strong and I can think, decide, reason and be known.

Philippines

RECOGNIZING WOMEN'S ACHIEVEMENTS



WOMEN CAN BE TECHNICIANS.

China

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MULTIPLE ROLES OF WOMEN

WOMEN

SHARING HOUSEWORK AND CHILDCARE

China

AS MEN'S EQUAL PARTNERS

I'm glad we now have this Day Care Centre again. This will really solve our problem.
Yes. That's for sure. Now, we'll both be free to do our jobs. And our children will be safe.

DAY CARE CENTRE OF CALZADA

Philippines

AS CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

SABINA I MUST TELL YOU HOW HAPPY I AM WITH YOU. WITHOUT ANY HELP FROM US, YOU HAVE LEARNT SO MUCH. YOU CAN EVEN DO A MAN'S JOB WELL. I HAVE FOUR SONS, BUT THEY ARE NO USE TO ME. FROM NOW ON YOU WILL LOOK AFTER MY LAND.
OH FATHER! I AM SO HAPPY, AT LAST YOU THINK THAT I AM GOOD WORKER.

Bangladesh

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Choosing subjects, choosing future

Enrolment alone does not guarantee girls' retention and achievement. In adjusting the balance of education between the sexes, it is important to take into account the mechanism of the support system for learning. In some countries, transport and financial assistance and child care for young mothers was provided. (UNESCO 1997)

The article, "*Educating Today for Jobs Tomorrow,*" in *Countdown* (UNESCO 1997) gives some examples of efforts in predominantly "male areas". In Australia, a programme called, *Tradeswomen on the Move*, sends women workers to visit schools to talk about their jobs in fields such as electronics and car repairs. These women serve as positive role models for young girls and offer them wider career options.

In Guinea, a programme, *Women, Science and Technology*, offers girls and young women scholarships for studying in technical high schools and colleges. More girls are now opting for otherwise nontraditional fields such electronics, carpentry and mechanics. There was also a programme which establishes the so-called NAFA centres which trained out-of-school boys and girls in non-formal education. In many NAFA centres, there has to be 50 per cent girls on the roster.

A video, *Pacific Women in Trade,* publicizes how young women in Pacific islands study the so-called nontraditional subjects such as drafting and automechanics. Their unusual choice met with ridicule from peers. It is true that, to prove themselves, they had to work much harder than the boys. Once their ability was shown, however, they earned the respect of both teachers and classmates. The reason they chose these subjects was a much better rate of return from the ensuing jobs. And do the jobs, normally a male trade, make them less of a woman? They don't think so. Life continues, and if anything, for them it has become better.

A Botswanian public campaign to promote girls in science has worked with young girls themselves addressing their possible apprehensions regarding the myth that women scientists are oddities. They produced interesting write-ups on such themes as 'Do you need to be special to become a scientist?' or 'Can women scientists find husbands?' (Nganunu 1995)

Another project promoting gender equity in education is Bangladesh's General Education Project (GEP). According to Stromquist (1994), the project adopted a thorough Women in Development (WID) strategy including curricula and textbooks revision to render them gender-sensitive, projecting positive role models for girls and strengthening recruitment of more women teachers.

A dire need exists for such programmes to multiply all around the world. As more girls and women enter nontraditional trades, their oddity will diminish. Should they excel in those fields, it will be easier for more and more women to join.

Positive role models

Projecting positive role models for girls and women is one of the most determining factors attracting girls into professional and technical fields traditionally reserved for men and boys.

Positive role models for boys and girls must be presented in a balanced way. Exercises need to include - for both sexes - building self-confidence, self-respect, self-esteem and the desire to continue with self-improvement. Above all, such materials need to evoke the fact that, except for child bearing, women and men, if nurtured and encouraged, can seek accomplishments far beyond the traditional thresholds imposed by stereotypes.

In Tanzania, for example, a series of posters was produced which present images of women in a great variety of roles: as traders, members of the police force, farmers, politicians and doctors, among others. These posters convey the message that these career options are open to women as well as men.

In another series of posters, boys are shown carrying firewood thereby suggesting that these tasks are not off-limits to them.

Another example of an effort to produce gender-sensitive materials is reflected in the book, *Sara -- Un Cadeau Special*. Produced by UNICEF ESARO, this book and video series, aims at sensitizing the public on the 'situation of African girls, the importance of girls' education, particularly in science and mathematics and practical skills'. Although the booklet was not specifically designed to strengthen readers' literacy skills, it could additionally serve this purpose.

Much more needs to be done to dispel the myth that girls and women are inherently unable to do well in these fields. Many call for campaigns to draw girls into well-paid technical fields and promote appreciation of the contributions women can make (Mishra, Khanna, Shrivastava and Sharma 1995, Fokhra 1995, and Ismail 1995). In almost all countries, rigorous campaigns can be launched to sustain this gain.

Writing about Malaysia, Ismail (1995) stresses the 'continuous inculcation of the image of modern women with their multifaceted roles, with brains, career and traditional roles.' Public awards to best women managers and entrepreneurs, exemplary mothers, and women farmers of the year have become usual in Malaysia and Thailand and bring home the fact that women can and do excel in all types of vocations and professions.

The media has been effective in raising girls' and women's and the general public awareness of the legitimacy of entering non-traditional female fields. In Zimbabwe, graduation of successful women trainees are widely publicized by national media.

China's remarkable agricultural development might be said to have played on the public recognition of the *Sisters of a Thousand Yuan*, a title bestowed on ordinary farmers who have acquired technical skills, raised their earnings considerably and helped others do the same.

Educators in key positions realise that stereotyped images and functions of women and men, long accepted as natural, should be questioned and challenged. The realization led to the exceptional establishment of the Forum of African Women Educators (FAWE) which has been successful in highlighting the importance of women's and girls' education and mobilizing resources for its support.

FAWE's members are ministers, university vice-chancellors and other celebrated personalities in education - all female. They represent a powerful block of positive role models for women and girls everywhere. FAWE insists that schools should present a balanced view of the real world, women's potential and contribution to the development of society.

Appreciating that the problem of girls' and women's education is the concern of the entire society, FAWE members welcomed associate memberships from their male counterparts.

Some key elements

Based on the experience of conducting tens of regional and national training workshops in Asia and the Pacific and, to a lesser extent in the Arab States and Africa, Aksornkool (1997) concludes that gender-sensitive materials, need to have at least four characteristics. She states:

"Certain basic principles underline the development of the learning materials and as such are central to the programme's success in the eyes of the women that participated in the project, irrespective of country of origin. The realistic portrayal of the life/environment of the learners and recognition of women's multiple responsibility, the importance of and practical methodology for enhancing economic productivity, the promotion of women's status in society and the focus on easing women's domestic work are the key factors behind the relevance of the materials and their benefit to those involved" (Aksornkool 1997:3)

Work is by far the most popular topic covering both paid and unpaid jobs in and outside the home. Technical know-how in agriculture is a favourite subject, including fertilizer and pesticides, animal feed, rice seedlings, and efficiency in cattle-raising and banana growing. Related critical areas range from co-operatives and marketing to hand pumps, electricity and do-it-yourself skills.

Literacy projects for adult women in Cape Verde, Congo, Gambia, Mali, Niger and Sierra Leone include "the spread of technology improving agricultural practices and protecting the environment (Niyonzima 1994). Burundi and Malawi have moved to recognize the double responsibility of women and the need to address that problem. Their projects aim to "sensitize women to their double responsibility and give them the means to alleviate their workload."

"Availability of women for literacy classes is jeopardized by lack of time following the daily overload of work to which they are victims. It is dangerous to undertake literacy without promoting the means to lighten the burdens of their day." (Niyonzima 1994:17)

UNESCO experiences of working with rural women confirm the great importance they attach to new agrotechnology. The skills of planting fragrant mushrooms and medicinal herbs in China, improved rice-growing, use of fertilizer and pest control in Thailand, cattle grazing in Bhutan, and pig raising in Papua New Guinea, are far more popular among farm women than sewing and tailoring and handicrafts.

Beside agricultural skills, other relevant occupational skills for poor women range from factory work, to piecework or home based employment. These areas are mostly for poor urban women. Most adult literacy programmes which target these women, rarely address the occupational needs of this growing sector.

Conclusion

Education for all will not be possible without effective provision for the education of women and girls. The world community gathered in Jomtien in 1990 and made that assertion. More recently, the Mid-Decade Review of Education for All (Amman, 1996) emphasized that despite the priority given to the education of women and girls, real progress has been far slower than expected. It has been observed that if the trend continues, illiteracy will become a female phenomenon by the 21st Century.

Analysis of past and current situations indicates that while girls' access to schooling might increase, access is but the tip of the iceberg. The nature of content, materials and methods as they are now will continue to push girls and women behind as they are insensitive to their specific conditions and needs and disadvantages.

Although policy statements abound committing countries gender sensitive education, many observe that, at the implementation level, gender sensitive curricula, materials and methods are few

and far between. While there are some excellent actions, they are but scattered and practitioners lack access to learning about others' efforts, success and problems.

The prevalent myth that responding to women's needs means 'pitting women against men', needs to be deconstructed and understood as baseless. For gender sensitive curricula and materials to be effective, its developers and users must be convinced that this offers benefits beyond the notion of education in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, it is an alternative and potent tool which could help us build a fairer and more humane world for all people of both sexes.

Women's and girls' education must now be seen as part of the overall societal issue. The definition of functional literacy needs to be sharpened and broadened to include several other pertinent areas that go well beyond income generation.

This new definition must be based on the new view of women and men and women -- as equally active players in family, community and national affairs and as half of those precious resources which are human. In so doing, basic education will have to aim for an overall improvement in the quality of life. Areas such as health and nutrition, remunerative skills training, learning to learn management and decision making skills, leadership, and building up self-confidence and self-respect need to be high on the agenda.

The contents, material and methods have to be adjusted in ways that make education attractive to girls and women and, at the same time, maintain fair consideration to men and boys.

Enough lip service has been given to women's education. Now is the time for serious and drastic action. More than ever, nations can no longer afford to ignore half their potential resources. Education for All needs to be interpreted as education for all women and all men. Only when that happens will Education for All stop being a slogan and start being a reality.

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